

# NEBRASKA SUPREME COURT



## *Office of Public Information*

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### **JUDGE IRWIN NAMED CO-CHAIR OF MINORITY JUSTICE COMMITTEE** *Committee to gain national spotlight as it hosts the 24<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference of the National Consortium on Racial and Ethnic Fairness in the Courts in Omaha May 9-12, 2012*

The Nebraska Minority Justice Committee is a joint effort of the Nebraska State Bar Association and the Nebraska Supreme Court. Since its inception in 2003, the Committee has developed and implemented a number of policy reforms, research projects, and educational initiatives aimed at 1) addressing racial disparities in both the juvenile and adult justice systems; 2) ensuring equal access to justice; and 3) promoting the diversity of Nebraska's judicial workforce and legal profession.

The Nebraska Supreme Court has appointed Court of Appeals Judge John Irwin to replace long time co-chair Hon. John Gerrard, who was confirmed by the U.S. Senate in January to the U.S. District Court. "Judge Irwin has had a long-term commitment in assuring that all lawyers and litigants experience an even playing field in Nebraska courts. He is innovative, and together with co-chair Linda Crump, will lead the Committee to a high level of excellence," said Judge Gerrard. A Court of Appeals Judge since 1992, Judge Irwin served on the original Minority Justice Task Force (2001-2003) and has co-chaired one of the Minority Justice Committee's Subcommittee's since inception (2003-2012). Of Judge Gerrard, Judge Irwin quoted Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, 'The life of a man consists not in seeing visions and in dreaming dreams, but in active charity and in willing service.' Judge Gerrard's active charity and willing service are a mark of distinction for Judge Gerrard, as well as a mark of distinction for Nebraska.

In addition to its local impact, the Committee has received national attention for its work: pioneering research and legislative reform to improve the extent to which juries are representative of the communities that they serve, receiving an American Bar Association Award for its programming to diversify the legal profession, examining ways in which communities can reduce failure to appear among communities of color, and by providing technical assistance to Commissions being established in other states.

In May 2012, the Committee will have another opportunity in the national spotlight as it hosts the 24<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference of the National Consortium on Racial and Ethnic Fairness in the Courts. Since 2010, Judge Irwin has chaired the planning committee for this event. Explaining the annual conference, Judge Irwin highlighted the facts that the National Consortium brings together thought-leaders and delegates of state justice systems from around the country to share their collective knowledge about best practices within their court systems for achieving fairness and access to justice for all. This is the first time the conference has been hosted in the Midwest,

presenting a new opportunity to showcase the work being done in Nebraska and to engage neighboring states in addressing these issues. The conference will take place at the Hilton Hotel in Omaha on May 9-12, 2012, and offers an impressive agenda filled with nationally renowned speakers on a broad range of topics related to: addressing language barriers, enhancing diversity and cultural competence, addressing racial disparities, and building the capacity to effect change (registration information is available online at [www.nebar.com](http://www.nebar.com)).

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